

JAN 09 2007

RECORD OF TELEPHONE INTERVIEW

The undersigned attorney for Applicant and Examiner Redding discussed the present application during a telephone interview conducted on January 9, 2007. The parties discussed claim 1 and the main reference cited in the Official Action, Babcox & Wilcox, DE-AS 1176785. Applicant explained that the packing assembly described in the Babcox & Wilcox reference is not configured to be removed and installed as an integral unit with what the spring washers 18 and 21 held intact within the packing chamber 16. Rather, in this device the packing chamber 16 screws off a threaded intermediate unit 15, which is welded in place. Removing the packing chamber 16 from the intermediate unit 15 releases the compression on the spring washers and allows the packing housing 16 and the spring washers 18 and 21 to be removed for refurbishment. But once the packing chamber 16 has been screwed off the fixed hub 15, the spring washers 18 and 21 are not held intact within the packing chamber 16 as claimed in the present application. Examiner Redding tentatively agreed with Applicant's understanding of the Babcox & Wilcox subject to his own reconsideration of the reference in view of the discussion.

The parties also discussed a proposed amendment to claim 1 to further clarify the claim language in view of the distinction between the claimed invention and the Babcox & Wilcox reference. Examiner Redding suggested that Applicant file an Amendment with the changes discussed and a Response explaining the differences between the claimed invention and the Babcox & Wilcox reference. Although a final agreement was not reached regarding patentability, Examiner Redding stated that the claims as proposed to be amended appear to define over the Babcox & Wilcox reference. Examiner Redding stated that he would have to confirm the teaching of the Babcox & Wilcox reference with a second review and conduct a supplemental search before reaching a final conclusion as to patentability of the amended claims.

REMARKS

Applicant thanks Examiner Redding for his careful review of the present application and the helpful approach taken during the telephone interview. Claims 1-24 are pending with claims 1, 2, 5, 12, 13, 15, 18 and 19 standing as rejected and claims 3, 4-6, 14, 15, 16, 17 and 20-24 objected to but indicated as allowable.

Applicant has concurrently filed an Amendment along the lines discussed during the telephone interview. As amended, claim 1 states that "wherein the housing and packing material comprise an integral unit constructed so as to be installed to and removed from the operative position with the packing material held intact within the housing." A similar amendment has been entered into the other independent claims under examination, claim 12 and 18. Applicant has amended the claims to clarify that the packing unit is constructed so as to be installed to and removed from the sootblower with the packing material held intact within the housing. As explained in the specification, this configuration produces significant advantages, including easier and safer removal and installation of the packing unit by allowing the unit to be easily removed with the packing material intact. The spent packing material can then be removed from the housing, and new packing material can be loaded, at a workbench or other suitable work area. See patent application at page 3, lines 25-34.

The Babcox & Wilcox reference describes the type of packing unit that the present invention was developed to replace. That is, the packing unit described in this reference is not an integral unit that can be removed and installed with packing material held intact within the housing. More specifically, the packing chamber 16 screws onto a threaded intermediate piece 15 that is welded in place. As stated in Babcox & Wilcox at page 2, second full paragraph, "[b]etween the flange 10 and the pipe 12 is welded an intermediate piece 15, which together with said fixed components retains the packing chamber 16. On the intermediate piece 15 having the external thread is screwed the packing chamber 16 and is prevented from twisting by the clamping bolt 17." Referring to the figure, it appears that to replace the steel spring washers 18 and 21 located within the chamber 16, the technician removes the cover 9 and then unscrews the packing chamber 16 from the fixed intermediate piece 15, which unloads the spring washers. However, once the packing chamber 16 has been unscrewed from the intermediate piece 15, there is nothing holding the spring washers in place within the packing chamber. Accordingly, the packing housing and spring washers in this packing unit do not "comprise an integral unit constructed so as to be installed to and removed from the operative position with the packing material held intact within the housing" as recited in the independent claims of the present application.

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CONCLUSION

It is believed that the preceding remarks are completely responsive to the Official Action mailed October 11, 2006, and that the claims are in condition for allowance. If the Examiner believes that there are any issues that can be resolved by a telephone conference, or that there are any informalities that can be corrected by an Examiner's amendment, please call Mike Mehrman at (404) 497-7400.

Respectfully submitted,



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